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AN OLD LANCASTER HOUSE.

A PECULIAR PEOPLE.

BY HOWARD PYLE.

THE city of Lancaster is bustling and progressive. But here and there, crowded in between structures of modern date, are remnants of old times, curious little houses one story high, with very steep roofs and one or two dormer-windows peeping over the edge. They are the houses of old German Lancaster. One visiting this old town is struck by the peculiarly foreign appearance of many of the folk he meets. He sees a smooth-shaven, long-haired people—the Mennonite Baptists—and here and there long-bearded members of the Dunker or German Baptist sect, both speaking Pennsylvania Dutch. It is of the latter people,

and of a sect springing from them, that we have here chiefly to speak.

Some fifteen miles from Lancaster by turnpike and twenty by rail lies the little village of Ephrata. It is a very secluded, sleepy-looking little place, in spite of the railroad that runs through it, shut in by surrounding hills and by a low line of mountains dignified by the name of Ephrata Ridge. The houses of the town straggle along a broad road which crosses the railroad near the station, dips away until it sweeps around in a curve over a bridge, past an old mill in front of a broad-built red brick house, and so away into the country. The houses, generally brick-

built, in many cases old-fashioned, are very comfortable and home-like.

Here one meets the Dunker *per se* in every by-road and lane—men with long beards and flowing hair parted in the middle. At the farm-houses are pleasant, matronly faces, stamped with humility and gentleness, while an air of almost saintly simplicity is given by the clear-starched cap, the handkerchief crossed on the breast, the white apron, and the plain gray or drab stuff of the dresses.

The style of living of these good people, their manners and customs, are of the most primitive type. Their aim is to imitate the early Christians in their habits of life as well as in their religious tenets. There is absolutely no distinction of caste among them.

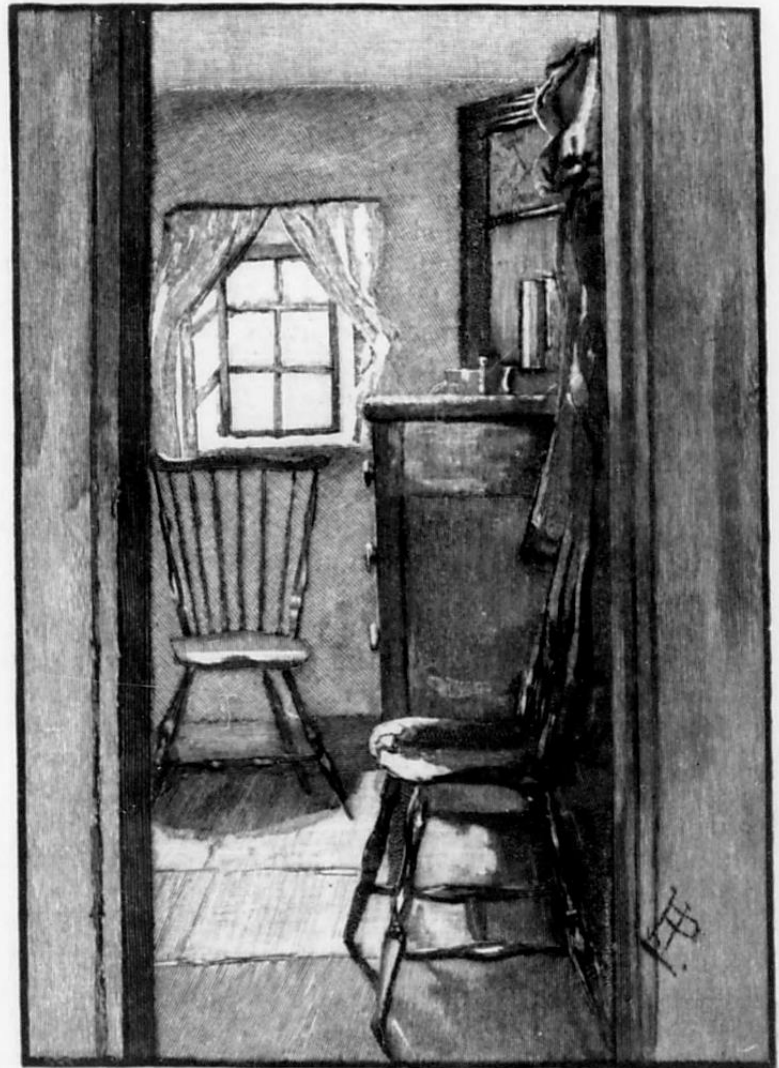
They settled at first near Philadelphia, in a spot which has since been called Germantown, from the various German religious refugees who settled there in the early part of the last century. The sect is now chiefly confined to central and western Pennsylvania, but has spread to other States, principally those of the Northwest, though there are churches established in western Maryland, West Virginia, and North Carolina. Their dress is of the simplest description, quaint and old-fashioned in its cut; they offer no resistance to injuries; they observe no conformity with the world and its manners and customs; they refuse to take oaths in courts of law; in these and many other ways resembling the Society of Friends.

Some of their religious ceremonies are exceedingly curious. They celebrate the Lord's Supper after the manner of the primitive Christians.

The feast begins about the time of candle-lighting. The men are seated upon one side of the meeting-house, the women upon the other. The first ceremony is that of the washing of feet, each sex performing

this duty for its own. Those who are to engage in the ordinance presently enter the meeting, carrying tubs of lukewarm water, and each member on the front benches removes his or her shoes and stockings. A man on the men's side and a woman on the women's then wash the feet one by one, taking the right hand of each individual, as they finish the washing, and giving the kiss of peace. After the one who performs the washing follows another with a long towel girded around the waist, who wipes the feet just washed, at the same time giving the right hand and the kiss of peace. As one benchful has the ceremony performed, it gives place to another. While this ceremony is being conducted, the minister or teachers make a brief speech or read appropriate portions of Scripture relating to the subject.

The next ceremony is the supper itself. Each third bench is so arranged that the



A DORMITORY IN THE SISTERS' HOUSE, EPHRATA.



THE KLOSTER.

back can be turned upon a pivot at each end, so as to form the top of a long table. This is covered with a white cloth, and presently brothers and sisters enter, bearing large plates or bowls of soup, which are placed upon the tables. Three or four people help themselves out of the same dish. After this the communion is administered, and the whole ceremony is concluded by the singing of hymns and preaching. This the brethren hold is the only true method of administering the ordinance of the Last Supper, and also hold that it is similar to that ceremony as celebrated in the earliest Christian Church.

Another peculiar ordinance among them is that of anointing the sick with oil, in accordance with the text in James, v. 14. The sick one calls upon the elders of the meeting, and at a settled time the ceremony is performed. It consists of pouring oil upon the head of the sick person, of laying hands upon them, and praying over them.

The ordinance of baptism is administered in running water and by threefold immersion, the officiating minister then laying his hands upon the recipient, who still kneels in the water, and praying over him or her.

The ministers or teachers, who receive no stipend whatever, are elected by the votes of the members of the church, he who receives the largest number of votes being pronounced elected. These elections are summoned by the elders of the church, who preside over them and receive the votes of the people, either *viva voce*, in whispers, or by closed ballots. If no candidate has a majority, or if there are a greater number of blank votes cast than for any one candidate, the election is pronounced void.

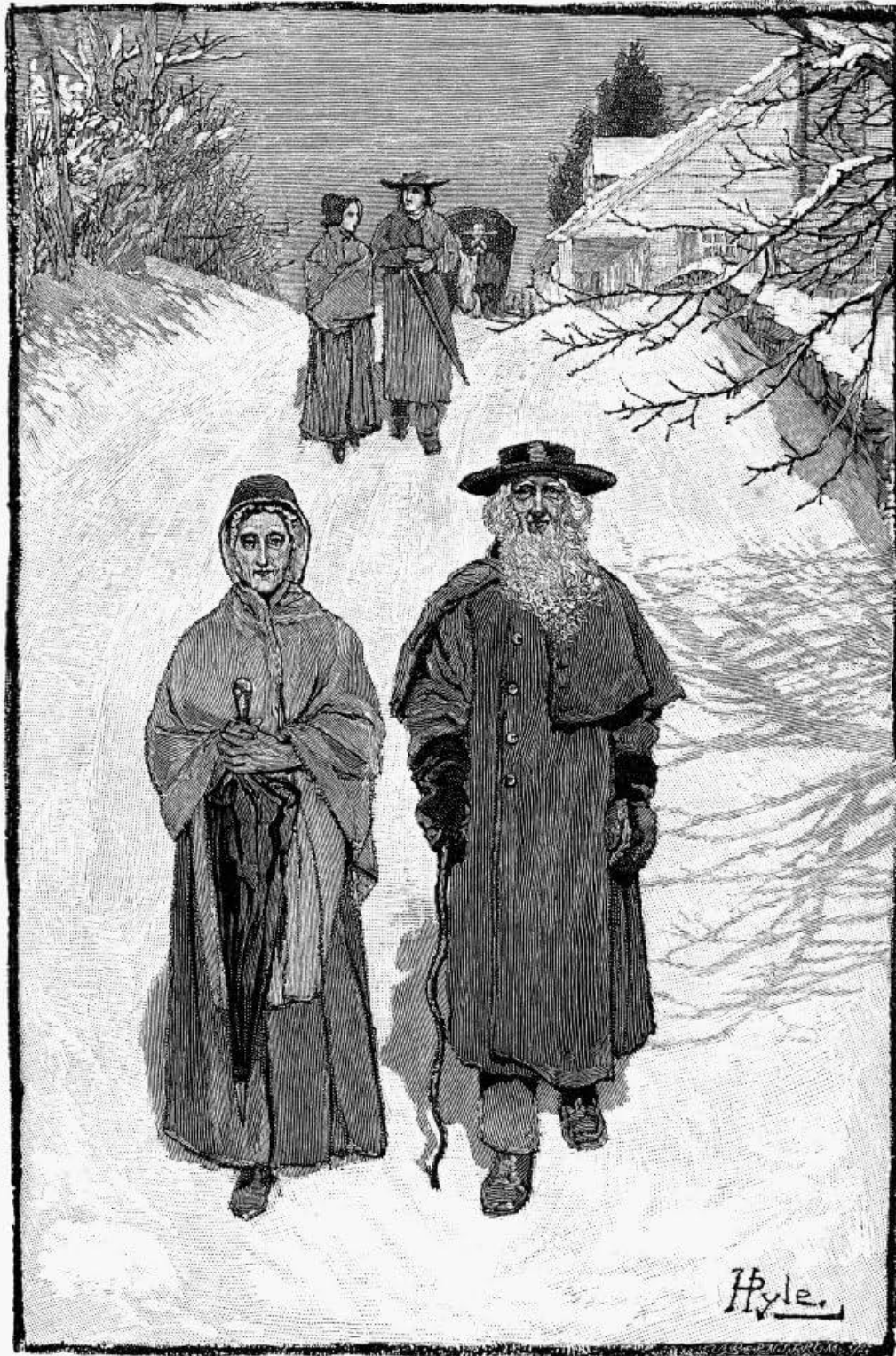
Such is a brief and condensed account of these people, and of their religious customs and ordinances. They are called Dunkers, or Tunkers, from the German *tunken*, which may be interpreted to dip, or probably "to sop" is a better equivalent word. They assume for themselves the name Brethren on account of the text Matthew, xxiii. 8, "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." They also sometimes call themselves "God's Peculiar People."

The first visit we ever made to a Dunker meeting was on a cold day in the latter part of November. The wind piped across the snow-clad hills and over the level white valleys, nipping the nose and

making the cheeks feel stiff like leather. As we neared the straggling, old-fashioned-looking town we passed an old farmer of the neighborhood and his wife trudging toward the meeting-house, the long gray beard of the former tangling in the wind or wrapping itself around neck and

ing-house were collected the farm wagons and dearborns of the folk, who themselves crowded into the low brick building, the men by one door, the women by the other.

The ceiling was low; the room was sunny and bright; there were two stoves, one



GOING TO MEETING.

breast, and further on a young couple in the quaint costume of the people, picturesque figures against the white of the broad-stretching road. Around the meet-

at either end of the building, at which warmed themselves the white-capped sisters at one end, the long-bearded brethren at the other, the latter standing with their



THE KISS OF PEACE.

backs to the stove, holding their horny palms to the warmth and rubbing them together. Presently a minister entered, and as he moved to the long table where his two confrères sat facing the congregation, he passed by the bench of the elder brethren. One after another of those nearest to him arose, the two right hands were clasped, and the two long gray beards met in the kiss of peace.

A hymn was sung in English, with a peculiar quavering of the voice and lingering upon each word. A hymn in German followed; then a sermon in German; then a second in the same language. The second preacher threw into his tones a peculiar intonation which we learned was characteristic of these people. It was a rather high-pitched monotone, carried throughout the sentence, and dropped

throughout the sentence, and dropped only at the last word. The gestures were easy and natural, and every now and then the voice dropped suddenly into a colloquialism absolutely startling, as the preacher directed some broad truth based on human nature directly at the hearts of his hearers. A sermon in English followed, and the service was concluded by another German hymn and the reading of a portion of Scripture.

It was from this people that a sect, probably one of the most interesting in this country, took its rise; a sect once numerous, now nearly extinct; once wealthy in fat lands and busy manufactories, now poor, though still having many of the comforts of life—the German Seventh-day Baptists. They live as a semi-commune, having only a degree of community of interests in the estate of the society. They are an ideal republic, where every man is of perfectly equal standing in the society, and they are a monastic order without enforced celibacy or monastic vows.

Near the broad road along which Ephrata stretches its straggling row of houses stands a curious pile of buildings of quaint, old-fashioned architecture. The larger are weather-boarded with planks or shingle; the smaller, which have something of a foreign look—half Swiss, half German—are built of stone. The main buildings stand on a little rise of ground, the others, some larger, some smaller, of frame and stone, are scattered around in its neighborhood.

The buildings standing on the mound, which loom up before us the moment we enter the ground, are great steep-roofed houses, several stories in height, spotted by many very small windows twinkling in the sunlight. The flooring beams of good sound poplar pierce through the walls and are pinned upon the outside. The buildings are gray and haggard with age; here and there the clapboards are loose; and there is that peculiar blind, sightless look that broken windows lend to an old house. These are the remains of the old enclosed village of Ephrata, once the centre of busy life and energy, now rapidly crumbling to decay. The buildings are those of the Kloster (cloister) of the German Seventh-day Baptists.

In 1724 Conrad Beissel, a man who learned the trade of weaver under Peter Becker, the first Dunker preacher in this country, was baptized into the German Baptist Church. He was a man of considerable intelligence and erudition, and, accepting the idea of primitive Christianity inculcated by that society, he saw no reason why they stopped short of complete reformation and return to the primitive principles of the Christian Church in

respect to observing the seventh instead of the first day of the week as the Sabbath. Upon this subject he wrote a tract, which he published in the year 1728. This created such a disturbance in the society of which he was a member, a society which has ever jealously guarded itself from innovations, that he was compelled to withdraw himself from membership with it. He retired to the then wilderness along the banks of the Cocalico, and there found a hut or cave that had once been inhabited by a hermit called Elimelech, and in it established himself as a recluse. In time, however, some of his old friends, together with others who had become convinced by his tract, gathered themselves together around his retreat, until quite a number had settled in the neighborhood of his once solitary habitation. About the year 1732 this recluse life was changed for a monastic one, and the earliest buildings of the Kloster were erected. The habit of the Capuchins, or White Friars, was adopted by the new monastic society. The brothers wore shirt, trousers, and vest, with a long white gown and cowl of woollen web in winter and linen in summer. The sisters' costume was the same, with the exception of a coarse flannel petticoat substituted for the trousers. There were no vows of celibacy exacted or taken, although the idea was considerably inculcated. Monastic names were given to all who entered the Kloster: the Prior, Israel Echerlin, took the name of Onesimus; Beissel, who steadily refused to accept any position of influence, took that of Friedsam, and was given the title of Spiritual Father of the community.

The society now gathered numbers, inasmuch that in 1740 there were thirty-six single brothers and thirty-five single sisters in their respective Klosters, while the community numbered nearly three hundred persons. The property and real estate grew to be of great value as the farm became productive and mills arose on the banks of the Cocalico, built by the hands of the brethren and sisters; and this wealth was the common stock of the so-

ciety, and the income was devoted to the common support. None, however, was obliged to contribute to this general stock. The mills were at that time the most extensive in that part of the country, embracing paper, woollen, saw, and grist mills; but of these little or no vestige now remains. It was here that one of if not the very first printing-press in Pennsylvania was erected, and the books and tracts of the society were printed within its own walls.





"IT WAS TO REPRESENT THE NARROW WAY."

Not the least singular thing about this singular people was their music. So far as we are able to discover, it is now nearly if not quite extinct in the fast decaying branches of the society. This music was composed and written by Beissel himself. It was founded upon the melodious and plaintive chords of the Æolian harp, of which Beissel was very fond, and one of which he had in his cell. It is written in a peculiar melancholy minor key, and was sung with a singularly soft modulation.

Such was Ephrata in the old time, prosperous, busy, beautiful, with broad land, with smiling pastures, sunny hills, and dewy dales. But now all its glory has passed. All its prosperity has departed, and nothing remains but ruin, decay—and picturesqueness. The last celibate

brother passed away years ago, and the celibate sisters (there are but four of them), without monastic name, without monastic dress, plain, matter-of-fact, elderly German women, subsist on a scanty allowance of fuel and flour from the estate, which has now nearly passed out of the hands of the society.

It was a queer old Dunker, gnarled and twisted, scarred and crooked as an aged fruit tree past fruit-bearing time, who acted as our cicerone in an exploring trip through the old building of the Sisters' Kloster. He had once been a man of more than ordinary intelligence among his people, but age and accident had snapped most of the bright strands of his intellect, though many still remained. He wore a broad-brimmed beaver hat, showing the white here and there at the edges where the fur was worn away, beneath which hung his long

silvery hair almost to his shoulders, meeting with the voluminous gray beard that lay upon his breast. He wore an ancient and much used coat of that distinctive cut so much affected by the Society of Friends. It, as well as his trousers, which were very short, made of homespun, and of a color brown as butternut, was patched in numerous places with some darker colored stuff.

He led us by a short-cut to the building, down the road and across a field, past a well-looking flour-mill of modern build, but having an old foundation. It was a part of the mills of the palmy days of the brotherhood. Beyond this we crossed a stile, cut across a sunny field, past a great rambling building that had once been the Brothers' House, from which faces peeped at us from the many

different little windows (it is now rented to several families), and so reached the Kloster proper.

The great building fronts toward the northeast, is whitewashed, and forms an L with the chapel adjoining. This is the Sisters' House, and very comfortable it looked from this side, the queer little windows winking down at us in the sun. It was along this wall that the wounded soldiers sat, waited on by the white-cowled sisters, after the bloody fight at Brandywine. Nearly three hundred Amer-

afterward found, but five feet high and twenty inches broad. Our old cicerone saw our curiosity at this and explained it to us. It was to represent the narrow way that leads to everlasting life, and always they must be of one size, five feet high and twenty inches broad.

We passed through a dormitory, through a dark passage into the chapel. It was a low room, constructed of heavy beams of poplar timber, hewn by hand, and built by the members of the society in the old days. The beams were dark

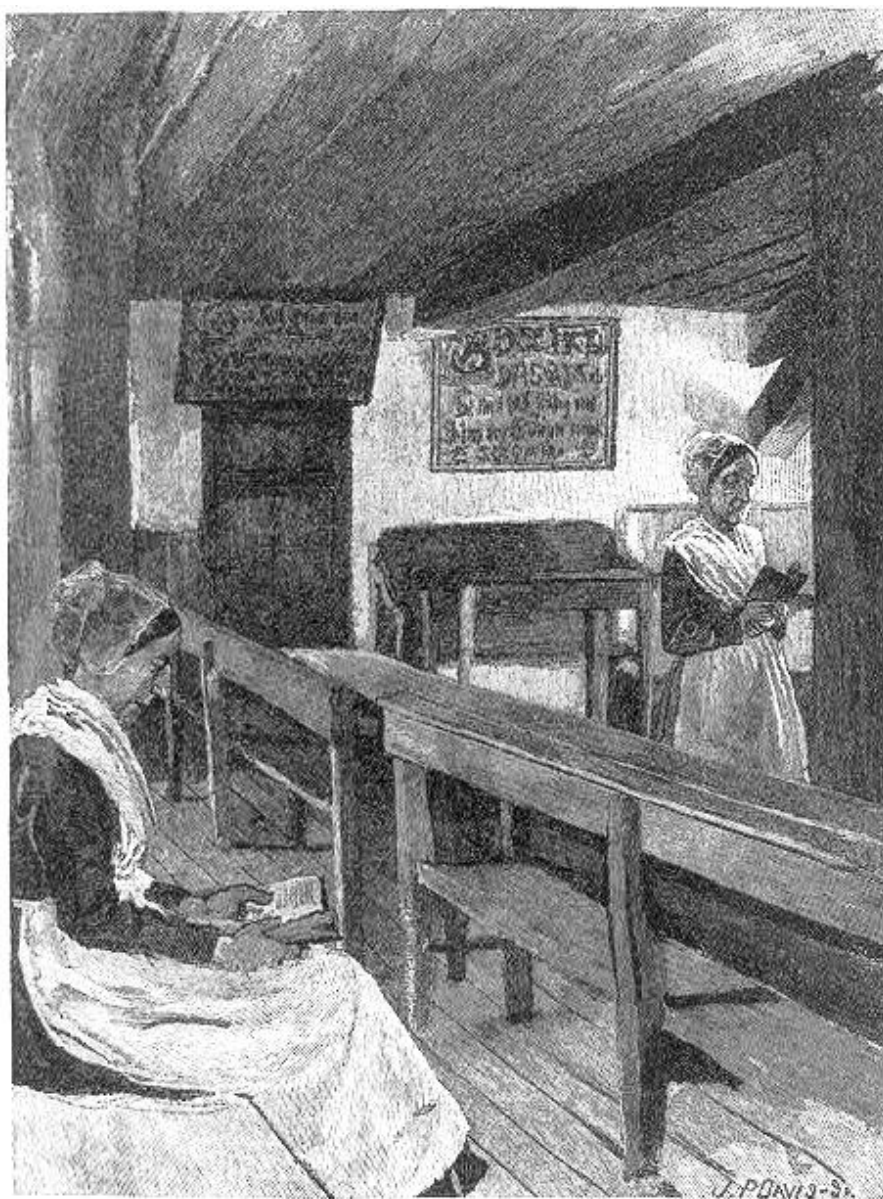


"IT WAS ALONG THIS WALL THAT THE WOUNDED SOLDIERS SAT."

ican soldiers were brought here to be nursed by the sisterhood.

The old Dunker did not knock at the door, but walked directly in, leading the way down a long passage to a low-ceiled, whitewashed room where a wood fire crackled in a large stove, making the kettle hum pleasantly to itself. An old-fashioned brass-handled bureau stood on one side, some quaint high-backed chairs stood around, a very thin and very tall old German clock stood against the wall, its top almost touching the ceiling, which, albeit, was only seven feet high; but what most struck us was the exceeding smallness of the doors. They were, we

with age, but the walls were whitewashed to a spotless purity, and the light that struggled in through the little windows showed that the floor was actually worn with scrubbing, so painfully clean that it seemed almost desecration to walk upon it; the nail heads fairly glistened here and there, so brightly were they polished with numberless applications of soap and sand. Around the walls were a number of curious antique-looking cards about three feet square, bearing mottoes and texts, all printed by hand, with a beauty of design and delicacy of execution that might rank them with the lost art of vellum manuscript printing. Some of the designs were



INTERIOR OF CHAPEL.

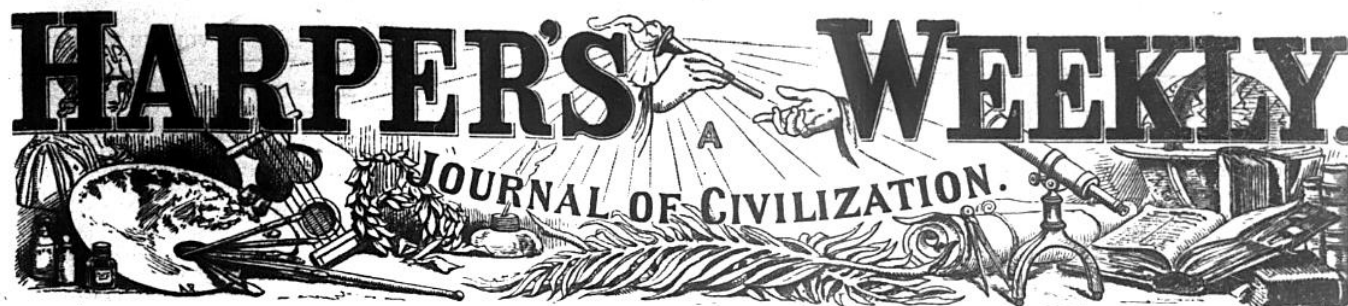
very unique, and all of them were aged, even mediæval looking. One of them represented the narrow way leading to eternal life. In the distance were numerous faces and figures gathered around a lamb. The winding path that led to this group was marked with appropriate texts from Scripture in German, many relating to the blessedness of celibacy; for instance: "They that are of the flesh do mind the things of the flesh," etc.; "He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord," etc.; and others as appropriate.

Nothing could be more interesting than our ramble through this great barn-like old building under the guidance of one

of the good sisters. Now we mounted a steep flight of stairs, clinging to a rope by way of balustrade; now plunged down a long mysterious passageway leading into utter darkness and mystery, the very place for a good ripe ghost of some long-passed-away cowed and hooded sister; now through vacant hallways down which the wind sighed through cracks and crannies as it lifted the loose shingles and weatherboards outside, making them crack and flap as it shook them about. Here and there we came to queer little rooms piled high with furniture, rickety and antique; here we discovered some curious wooden household utensils, dishes, platters, spoons, and candlesticks, of turned poplar wood,

used in the earlier love-feasts and household life of the community. In another room we found a great hour-glass standing in the window, a timepiece that had probably drained slowly with the waning life of some former head sister or Prioress; and here was a hewn bench and billet of poplar wood, for in the earlier days the brothers and sisters stretched their weary limbs at night upon such benches, and reposed their weary heads

upon such billets; not from motives of piety, but of economy. All was vacant, barren of the life that had once stirred inside of it; but here and there, as a little oasis in this desert of mouldering loneliness, some old sister had gathered together a lot of the best preserved furniture, and had fitted up a room where the old dame herself was sleepily awaiting the coming of the great night that should give her rest forever.



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LOVE FEAST AMONG THE DUNKERS.

THE Dunkers, a sect whose doctrines and habits of life are very similar to those of the Mennonites, derive the name by which they are popularly known in this country from a German word descriptive of their mode of baptism by immersion, but they are called by themselves "Brethren." They came to America between 1719 and 1729 from Germany, whence they were driven by religious persecution, and first settled in Pennsylvania, where they are still more numerous than in any other State.

Like the Friends, they practice extreme simplicity in dress and speech. They have love-feasts, practice the washing of feet, the laying on of hands, anointing with oil, use the kiss of charity, and other primitive habits of worship. Owing to their aversion to statistics, which they regard as savoring of pride, it is not easy to obtain trustworthy accounts of their number, but it is estimated to be about one hundred thousand. They have bishops, elders, teachers, and deacons, are opposed to war, and will not engage in law-suits. Their annual meeting, which is held about Whitsuntide, which this year occurs on the 13th of May, is attended by the bishops and teachers, and lay representatives chosen by their congregations.



A LOVE FEAST AMONG THE DUNKERS.—DRAWN BY HOWARD PYLE.—[SEE PAGE 170.]

